

## Question 3

(Suggested time — 40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following paragraphs open Joan Didion's essay "Los Angeles Notebook." Read them carefully. Then write an essay in which you characterize Didion's view of the Santa Ana winds and analyze how Didion conveys this view. Your analysis might consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.

Line  
(5) There is something uneasy in the Los Angeles air this afternoon, some unnatural stillness, some tension. What it means is that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow, a hot wind from the northeast whining down through the Cajon and San Geronio Passes, blowing up sandstorms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to the flash point. For a few days now we will see smoke back in the canyons, and hear sirens in the night. I have neither heard nor read that a Santa Ana is due, but I know it, and almost everyone I have seen today knows it too. We know it because we feel it. The baby frets. The maid sulks. I rekindle a waning argument with the telephone company, then cut my losses and lie down, given over to whatever it is in the air. To live with the Santa Ana is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanistic view of human behavior.

I recall being told, when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on an isolated beach, that the Indians would throw themselves into the sea when the bad wind blew. I could see why. The Pacific turned ominously glossy during a Santa Ana period, and one woke in the night troubled not only by the peacocks screaming in the olive trees but by the eerie absence of surf. The heat was surreal. The sky had a yellow cast, the kind of light sometimes called "earthquake weather." My only neighbor would not come out of her house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband roamed the place with a machete. One day he would tell me that he had heard a trespasser, the next a rattlesnake.

"On nights like that," Raymond Chandler once wrote about the Santa Ana, "every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and

study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen." That was the kind of wind it was. I did not know then that there was any basis for the effect it had on all of us, but it turns out to be another of those cases in which science bears out folk wisdom. The Santa Ana, which is named for one of the canyons it rushes through, is a *foehn* wind, like the *foehn* of Austria and Switzerland and the *khamisin* of Israel. There are a number of persistent malevolent winds, perhaps the best known of which are the mistral of France and the Mediterranean sirocco, but a *foehn* wind has distinct characteristics: it occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind. Whenever and wherever a *foehn* blows, doctors hear about headaches and nausea and allergies, about "nervousness," about "depression." In Los Angeles some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unmanageable. In Switzerland the suicide rate goes up during the *foehn*, and in the courts of some Swiss cantons the wind is considered a mitigating circumstance for crime. Surgeons are said to watch the wind, because blood does not clot normally during a *foehn*. A few years ago an Israeli physicist discovered that not only during such winds, but for the ten or twelve hours which precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions. No one seems to know exactly why that should be; some talk about friction and others suggest solar disturbances. In any case the positive ions are there, and what an excess of positive ions does, in the simplest terms, is make people unhappy. One cannot get much more mechanistic than that.

(1968)

END OF EXAMINATION

there, and what an excess of positive ions does, in the simplest terms, is make people unhappy. One cannot get much more mechanistic than that.

## Annotation

One technique you can use is **annotation**. Annotating a text requires reading with a pen or pencil in hand. If you are not allowed to write in your book, write on Post-it notes. As you read, circle words you don't know, or write them on the Post-it notes. Identify main ideas — **thesis statements**, **topic sentences** — and also words, phrases, or sentences that appeal to you or that you don't understand. Look for figures of speech, or tropes, such as metaphors, similes, and personification — as well as **imagery** and detail. If you don't know the technical term for something, just describe it. For example, if you come across an adjective-and-noun combination that seems contradictory, such as "meager abundance," and you don't know that the term for it is **oxymoron**, you might still note the juxtaposition of two words that have opposite meanings. Use the margins or Post-it notes to ask questions or to comment on what you have read. In short, as you read, listen to the voice in your head, and write down what that voice is saying.

Following is an annotated version of the Didion passage:

There is something uneasy in the Los Angeles air this afternoon, some unnatural stillness, some tension. What it means is that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow, a hot wind from the northeast whining down through the Cajon and San Geronio Passes, blowing up sand storms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to flash point. For a few days now we will see smoke back in the canyons, and hear sirens in the night. I have neither heard nor read that a Santa Ana is due, but I know it, and almost everyone I have seen today knows it too. We know it because we feel it. The baby frets. The maid sulks. I rekindle a waning argument with the telephone company, then cut my losses and lie down, given over to whatever it is in the air. To live with the Santa Ana is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanistic view of human behavior.

I recall being told, when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on an isolated beach, that the Indians would throw themselves into the sea when the bad wind blew. I could see why. The Pacific turned ominously glossy during a Santa Ana

Long sentence  
Related words: Anxiety, foreboding  
Appeal to senses  
Short sentences  
Folk tale?  
Echo of foreboding  
In opening  
Look up word

period, and one woke in the night troubled not only by the peacocks screaming in the olive trees but by the eerie absence of surf. The heat was surreal. The sky had a yellow cast, the kind of light sometimes called "earthquake weather." My only neighbor would not come out of her house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband roamed the place with a machete. One day he would tell me that he had heard a trespasser the next a rattlesnake.

Vivid images

Personal anecdote

More anxiety words

Look up name

"On nights like that," Raymond Chandler once wrote about the Santa Ana, "every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen." That was the kind of wind it was. I did not know then that there was any basis for the effect it had on all of us, but it turns out to be another of those cases in which science bears out folk wisdom. The Santa Ana, which is named for one of the canyons it rushes through, is a foehn wind, like the foehn of Austria and Switzerland and the hamsin of Israel. There are a number of persistent malevolent winds, perhaps the best known of which are the mistral of France and the Mediterranean

Seemingly contradictory sources of information

Good description

sirocco, but a foehn wind has distinct characteristics: it occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind. Whenever and wherever foehn blows, doctors hear about headaches and nausea and allergies, about "nervousness," about "depression." In Los Angeles some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unmanageable. In Switzerland the suicide rate goes up during the foehn, and in the courts of some Swiss cantons the wind is considered a mitigating circumstance for crime. Surgeons are said to watch the wind, because blood does not clot normally during a foehn. A few years ago an Israeli physicist discovered that not only during such winds, but for the ten or twelve hours which precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions. No one seems to know exactly why that should

At least 7 scientific facts

Why in quotes?

be; some talk about friction and others suggest solar disturbances. In any case the positive ions are there, and what an excess of positive ions does, in the simplest terms, is make people unhappy. One cannot get much more mechanistic than that.

Strange — should be positive

## Dialectical Journal

Another way to interact with a text is to keep a **dialectical journal**, or double-entry notebook. Dialectical journals use columns to represent visually the conversation between the text and the reader. Let's look at a dialectical journal set up with note taking on the left (in this case, sections of the text you think are important) and with note making on the right (your comments).

| NOTE TAKING   | PARA. | NOTE MAKING   |
|---|-------|---|
| What it means is that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow, a hot wind from the northeast whining down through the Cajon and San Geronimo Passes, blowing up sand storms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to flash point.  | 1     | "drying the hills and the nerves" — example of zeugma, makes connection between nature and human behavior. Long sentence winding to the end — a "flash point" — like the winds "whining" down the passes and causing humans to act crazy. |
| "On nights like that," Raymond Chandler once wrote about the Santa Ana, "every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen."   | 3     | Chandler, who wrote crime fiction, was known for his hard-boiled style and cynicism. His quotation offers another image that supports Didion's view of the Santa Ana winds' effects on human behavior.                                    |
| Whenever and wherever foehn blows, doctors hear about headaches and nausea and allergies, about "nervousness," about "depression." In Los Angeles some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unmanageable. In Switzerland the | 3     | These are impressive reports, from all over the world, and they make Didion's argument about the effects of winds on behavior convincing. They're basically a list — they could almost be bullet points.                                  |

| QUOTATION  | PARAPHRASE OR SUMMARIZE  |
|--|--|
| There is something uneasy in the Los Angeles air this afternoon, some unnatural stillness, some tension. What it means is that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow, a hot wind from the northeast whining down through the Cajon and San Geronio Passes, blowing up sand storms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to flash point. For a few days now we will see smoke back in the canyons, and hear sirens in the night. I have neither heard nor read that a Santa Ana is due, but I know it, and almost everyone I have seen today knows it too. We know it because we feel it. The baby frets. The maid sulks. I rekindle a waning argument with the telephone company, then cut my losses and lie down, given over to whatever it is in the air. To live with the Santa Ana is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanistic view of human behavior. | The winds are creepy. They bring sand storms and cause fires. People know they're coming without being told because babies and maids act strange. The speaker picks a fight and then gives up. The Santa Ana winds make us aware that human behavior can be explained in terms of physical causes and processes. |
| I recall being told, when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on an isolated beach, that the Indians would throw themselves into the sea when the bad wind blew. I could see why. The Pacific turned ominously glossy during a Santa Ana period, and one woke in the night troubled not only by the peacocks screaming in the olive trees but by the eerie absence of surf. The heat was surreal. The sky had a yellow cast, the kind of light sometimes called "earthquake weather." My only neighbor would not come out of her house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband roamed the place with a machete. One day he would tell me that he had heard a trespasser, the next a rattlesnake.  | Didion talks about her early experiences with the winds, plus the folklore about them. She mentions things that seem weird — peacocks screeching and a very quiet ocean. She says her neighbors are strange too; one stays indoors, and the other walks around with a big knife.                                 |

| RHETORICAL STRATEGY OR STYLE ELEMENT  | EFFECT OR FUNCTION   |
|---|--|
| <p>Personification: the wind whines</p> <p>Cumulative sentence</p> <p>Two short sentences: "The baby frets. The maid sulks."</p> <p>"rekindle"</p>  | <p>Giving the wind a human quality makes it even more threatening.</p> <p>Makes her point by accumulating details about what it means that the Santa Ana is beginning to blow.</p> <p>Those simple sentences reduce human behavior to irrefutable evidence. We can't argue with what we see so clearly.</p> <p>Though she's talking about restarting an argument with the phone company, the word makes us think of starting a fire, like the wind does up in the hills.</p>   |
| <p>Subordinate clause in the middle of that first sentence: "when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on an isolated beach."</p> <p>"peacocks screaming in the olive trees"</p> <p>Compound sentence: My only neighbor would not come out of her house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband roamed the place with a machete.</p> <p>"machete"</p> | <p>The clause accentuates Didion's isolation and because it's so long almost makes her experience more important than the Indians who threw themselves into the ocean.</p> <p>Kind of an upside-down image. Peacocks are usually regal and elegant; these are screaming. Also olive trees are associated with peace (the olive branch). Supports the idea that the Santa Ana turns everything upside down. "And" as the coordinating conjunction makes the wife hiding and the husband with the machete equally important.</p> <p>"Machete" is associated with revolutions in banana republics, vigilantes. Suggests danger.</p> |



| QUOTATION  | PARAPHRASE OR SUMMARIZE   |
|--|---|
| "On nights like that," Raymond Chandler once wrote about the Santa Ana, "every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen." That was the kind of wind it was. I did not know then that there was any basis for the effect it had on all of us, but it turns out to be another of those cases in which science bears out folk wisdom. | Didion quotes a writer who describes the effects of the wind as causing women to want to kill their husbands. She says that folklore sometimes has a basis in science.  |
| The Santa Ana, which is named for one of the canyons it rushes through, is a <i>foehn</i> wind, like the <i>foehn</i> of Austria and Switzerland and the <i>hamsin</i> of Israel . . . A few years ago an Israeli physicist discovered that not only during such winds, but for the ten or twelve hours which precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions.                                | This section gives scientific facts about the Santa Ana wind, including its generic name, <i>foehn</i> . Didion names other winds like it in other parts of the world, but says the <i>foehn</i> has its own characteristics. She names some of the effects the <i>foehn</i> has on people in various places. |

The following essay analyzes how Joan Didion creates a sense of foreboding that, in turn, helps her to develop her argument about the winds' effects on human behavior.

### Joan Didion's Santa Ana Winds: A Mechanistic View of Nature

by Jane Knobler

The ominous description of Los Angeles preceding the arrival of the Santa Ana wind, juxtaposed with a scientific-sounding explanation develops Joan Didion's view that human behavior is basically a result of mechanics. She recreates the tense, stifling atmosphere that precedes the wind and argues that its effect on the people of Los Angeles can be explained by science. The eerie atmosphere, like a 1930s detective film based on a Raymond Chandler novel, highlights the strangeness of a wind affecting behavior even before the wind has begun to blow.

The effect of Didion's diction in the first part of the essay is to create foreboding; terror is just over the horizon. The wind cranks the nerves to a "flash point," causing arguments to be "rekindle[d]"; one needs a "machete" for protection. The reader is reminded of the ease with which disaster visits the West Coast. Forest fires, mudslides, snakebite, murder can happen in a moment.

| RHETORICAL STRATEGY OR STYLE ELEMENT   | EFFECT OR FUNCTION  |
|--|---|
| Allusion to Raymond Chandler   | Chandler, who wrote crime fiction, was known for his hard-boiled style and cynical views. The allusion to Chandler helps create the ominous tone. |
| Complex sentence: "There are a number of persistent malevolent winds, perhaps the best known of which are the <i>mistral</i> of France and the Mediterranean <i>sirocco</i> , but a <i>foehn</i> wind has distinct characteristics: it occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind." | The details accumulate, ending in "hot dry wind" to create a picture of the "persistent malevolent wind."   |

The word choice in the second part of the essay is more scientific; Didion provides names for these dangerous winds as well as statistics and facts about the "suicide rate," "unmanageable" children, and a "mitigating circumstance for crime." She supports her view that living in Los Angeles requires an understanding that human behavior is often out of our control. The dark atmosphere the Santa Ana wind creates has concrete, dire consequences that can be reported in terms of misbehavior and death. The vivid description of the impending terror that precedes the Santa Ana wind is highlighted when it is followed by the facts about the evil wind.

Didion's choice and accumulation of detail also heighten the sense of foreboding. The coming of the wind has negative effects on the baby who "frets" and the maid who "sulks"; it causes the "eerie absence of surf." The world is in an unnatural state. One cannot trust one's expectations or perceptions. The long cumulative sentence that describes the "persistent malevolent winds" begins by naming other winds, moves to the wind's beginning as a "cold mass," and ends with the increasingly frightening "hot dry wind." Those last three words reinforce what is "malevolent" in the beginning of the sentence. The wind's "positive ions" seem at first a scientific explanation, but a second look shows them to be another perversion of nature. Wind should be cool; this wind blows hot. Something positive should bring happiness. These positive ions make us unhappy. Nature is a force to be reckoned with; all of our good intentions cannot stand up to the Santa Ana wind.

The evil Santa Ana winds have a negative effect on human behavior. When they are coming, the only course is to take to one's bed. Otherwise, one may risk behaving

badly or becoming the victim of someone else's bad behavior. It won't be our fault. It will be the fault of the Santa Ana winds.